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FOR NEA/ARP, S/WCI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2016  
TAGS: [KAWC](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [BA](#) [BILAT](#) [CTR](#)  
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS PUBLICLY THAT GTMO OBSTACLE  
IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

REF: MANAMA 1163

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) All newspapers July 5 covered statements by Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa at a press conference in which he called for the release of the three remaining Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo and characterized the detention facility as an "obstacle" in bilateral relations. Speaking at a joint press conference with Shaikha Haya bint Rashed Al Khalifa to congratulate her on being elected as president of the upcoming UN General Assembly, Shaikh Khalid said he had met recently with the Ambassador (reftel) and "informed him (the Ambassador) that Bahrain wanted a resolution to the detention without trial" of Isa Al Murbati, Juma Al Dossary, and Salah Al Balooshi. He added that he told the Ambassador that leaving the issue unresolved "worries everyone and muddles U.S. relations with the Arab countries." He also referred to U.S. and Bahraini officials holding talks on GTMO in the United States.

¶2. (SBU) The Minister's comments follow a statement issued earlier in the week by senior MFA official Saeed Al Faihani correcting an article in Arabic daily Al Waqt, which claimed an Embassy source said that the Foreign Minister and Ambassador did not discuss GTMO in their June 25 meeting. (Note: The journalist misquoted PAO on the issue. PAO has spoken with the journalist to ensure she adheres completely to Embassy statements in the future.) Al Faihani said Shaikh Khalid had "reiterated the demand to release the three Bahraini detainees and close the camp." Al Faihani continued that the Ambassador had delivered a memo on preparations for the visit of a Bahraini security delegation to GTMO.

¶3. (C) Comment: Shaikh Khalid's and Al Faihani's public statements reflect a new government approach to the issue of Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo. The government, and in particular Shaikh Khalid, have been widely criticized by parliamentarians, columnists, and the American attorneys for the Bahraini detainees for not being strong enough advocates for the Bahrainis. A higher profile public position may insulate the government from calls for more aggressive responses. In a July 4 meeting, the newly appointed DCM for the Bahraini Embassy in Washington told Emboffs that Shaikh Khalid had identified GTMO as one of the DCM's top three policy issues to focus on immediately upon his arrival in the U.S.

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